

---

**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD  
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

---

Landmark/District:	<b>Watkins Elementary School/Capitol Hill</b>	( ) Agenda
Address:	<b>420 12<sup>th</sup> Street, SW</b>	(x) Consent Calendar
Meeting Date:	<b>September 22, 2016</b>	(x) Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	<b>16-566</b>	(x) Demolition
Staff Reviewer:	<b>Andrew Lewis</b>	(x) Conceptual Design

---

The District of Columbia Department of General Services (DGS) and Department of Public Schools (DCPS), along with Perkins Eastman DC Architects, propose to modernize Watkins Elementary School by rehabilitating the building and constructing a new addition.

**Watkins Elementary School**

Watkins Elementary School was constructed in 1962 within the boundaries of the Capitol Hill Historic District but is not historically significant because it postdates the historic district's period of significance of 1791-1945.

**Proposed Rehabilitation and New Construction**

The proposed rehabilitation and new construction were designed to improve the overall appearance of the school, create a more open and inviting entrance, provide additional space and engage Pennsylvania Avenue to the southwest and the large playing fields/park area immediately to the east.

The exterior rehabilitation work consists mostly of introducing a new entrance canopy and vestibule, removing window unit air conditioners, incorporating brise-soleils on the western and southern elevations, and screening mechanical equipment on the roof.

The new addition will house a gymnasium, cafeteria, media center, administrative spaces and related functions. The largest portion will be constructed on an existing parking lot just to the east of the school but additional space will also be provided by modifying Watkins' southern wing. The proposed massing will allow the existing entry tower and academic spine to remain the tallest and most predominant elements, but the gently curved roof forms will provide some visual interest to the otherwise rectilinear complex. Large picture windows will break down the scale of the new additions and better relate the elevations to Pennsylvania Avenue and the adjacent park/playing fields.

The materials palette features accent brick, ceramic wall tiles and metal panels in subtle shades of grey. Brick to match the existing and translucent insulated panels will also be used.

At the request of the community, the small garden space on the southern end of the site will be retained, expanded and incorporated into the site by a low knee wall and fence. A trellis will also be introduced onto the southern elevation to encourage a “green wall” effect.

### **Evaluation**

Since the school itself is not historically significant, the primary preservation-related concern is to ensure that the new addition is compatible with the surrounding historic district. Although the new addition is relatively large, its scale is broken down by being lower than, and constructed mostly “behind” the existing school. The use of large picture windows, a new entry canopy, additional ingress/egress points and metal panels in subtle shades of grey also improve connections to Pennsylvania Avenue and the park space/playing fields. Overall, the proposed concept allows the new addition to blend in well with the existing school and the larger historic context. The rehabilitation work also benefits the historic district by improving the appearance of the school.

### **Recommendation**

HPO recommends that the Board:

- Find the concept consistent with the DC Historic Landmark and Historic District Protection Act; and
- Delegate any final review to HPO, subject to any Board comments.